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# James Rouse--A Man for All Seasons

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# James Rouse — a man for all seasons

Donna Shalala, Secretary of Health and Human Services, said it best: he "did more to revitalize American cities than anyone this century." Recognition of this fact came last September when President Clinton awarded him our nation's highest civilian honor — the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

James W. Rouse, died at the age of 81, just 17 days short of his 82nd birthday on April 26 — a long life with long-lasting achievements by a humanist and an urbanist, a man often referred to as a "real Christian" and an "urban visionary."

Where does one begin?

Do you start with his first developer-built enclosed shopping mall in the country nearly 40 years ago? Or do you recognize his vision with the construction of Columbia, Maryland, now almost 30 years old, and widely regarded as this country's most successful new town? Or do you consider his work with "festival marketplaces," such as the 20 year-old Faneuil Hall in Boston, as a pioneering effort to revitalize America's inner cities? Or do you consider his work in the last decade of his life to provide more than 42,000 new and rehabilitated housing units for the urban poor in cities throughout this country?

One of six children whose father taught him the value of hard work, he dropped out of the University of Virginia during the height of the Depression in 1933. This did not deter him from getting a law degree from the University of Maryland, going to school nights. He started a mortgage business, with a partner, in 1939, served in the Navy during the war, and prospered with mortgages on apartments and shopping centers after the war. He formed his James W. Rouse Company, Inc. in 1954.

A pioneer in building retail centers, he is credited with building the first enclosed shopping mall created by a developer in this country in Glen Burnie, Maryland in 1958. This 232,000 square foot Harundale Mall (Warwick Mall, by comparison, is 1.1 million square feet) is one of 69 retail centers that generated \$116 million of earnings before depreciation and deferred taxes for the Rouse Company in 1995.

His crowning achievement, according to any urban planner, was his construction of Columbia in the countryside of Howard County, approximately in the middle of the 40 mile corridor between Baltimore and Washington DC, still one of the fastest growing regions of the country.

Organized around nine villages and a town center, Columbia was his attempt to instill order into the typical chaotic and sprawling suburban development so common in this nation. Today the 83,000 resi-

dents live in 30,000 housing units, of which 35 percent are single family detached homes, 40 percent are townhouses and condominium apartments and 25 percent are rental townhouses and apartments. And more than 2,500 businesses now call Columbia their home to provide 59,000 jobs for residents and others throughout the region.

More than one third of the 14,000 acre site has been set aside for parks, playgrounds and natural areas, including 71 miles of bicycle and walking paths and three man-made lakes. A city with interfaith centers rather than churches so that all may share the same religious facilities, no matter the faith, and subsidized housing for the poor. What other suburban

development makes such provisions?

And most impressive, 18 percent of the population living here is black and 6 percent represent other minorities. On several occasions when speaking with these residents, I was told that there is never any question of buying or renting property anywhere in Columbia, something never experienced by them before in other developments. Of interest, the first baby born here in 1967 was of a mixed racial couple. The hundreds who turned out for Jim Rouse's memorial service in Columbia represented this broad spec-

(See **Smolski** on page 13)

*'A real Christian  
and an urban  
visionary.'*

## BOTTOM LINERS



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"Sorry, I don't need any encyclopedias. ...  
Do you have any mutual funds?"

## James Rouse: A lover of cities

### ► Smolski

*Continued from page 11*

trum of the community.

The next chapter in his life turned to revitalizing the city, starting with Faneuil Hall Marketplace, just 20 years ago. He turned a run-down and largely abandoned facility into a retailing gold mine that draws one million persons per month, until recently more people than Disney World.

He did not stop here: Harborplace in Baltimore, South Street Seaport in New York City, Grand Avenue in Milwaukee, Union Station in St. Louis, Underground Atlanta in Atlanta, Pioneer Square in Portland, Oregon and others that have brought jobs and people back to city centers. Today this legacy of these revitalized city centers is a direct result of what was then called the "Rousification of cities."

Retiring as CEO of the Rouse Company at the age of 68, he could have spent an easy life aboard his boat, on the golf links or just enjoyed a relaxing life. Instead this millionaire took on "by far the most important work" of his life - the establishment of the nonprofit Enterprise Foundation to provide housing and advocate for the urban poor.

He expressed this philosophy in 1982 when he spoke at Brown University in the

series on "Who will save the American City?" Recapping some of his work, he said, "What we've done in Baltimore ...and in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and other cities, in the field of physical development, we now need to do in the social development of the city. This is a new frontier for us in this society."

He carried out this charge through the Foundation by constructing over 42,000 new and rehabilitated housing units through the end of 1994, working with neighborhood groups in many cities, providing money and expertise and convincing businesses to get involved. According to Frank Newman, CEO of Bankers Trust Company, he "inspired a movement of community groups and American corporations to see the value and opportunities in their inner-city neighborhoods."

And for city lovers he had this to say: "Cities are where the action is. Without them we would have none of the things we associate with a modern society. No arts, no education, no culture, no commerce." And Time Magazine would add "And no fun." Jim Rouse, the man and the visionary, will be missed.

*Chester E. Smolski is Professor Emeritus of Geography at Rhode Island College and a frequent contributor to the Providence Business News.*

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